

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05

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FM AMEMBASSY CAPE TOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7381

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAPE TOWN 1096

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PDEV, SF, WA

SUBJ: NAMIBIA: CONVERSATION WITH VAN HEERDEN

1. SUMMARY: PIK BOTHA'S AIDE, NEIL VAN HEERDEN, HAS PRIVATELY INDICATED TO US THE SAG IS PREPARED TO ACCEPT POSTPONEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE DATE FOR NAMIBIA. SUCH A POSITION, IF CONFIRMED, WOULD HAVE IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS REGARDING SOUTH AFRICA'S INTENTIONS AND STRATEGY. END SUMMARY.

2. PIK BOTHA'S ADIDE, NEIL VAN HEERDEN, TOLD EMBASSY POLITICAL COUNSELOR JUNE 1 THAT THE SAG WAS STILL CONSIDERING WHAT POSITIVE
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STEPS IT COULD TAKE TO ASSIST IN THE DIPLOMATIC PROCESS WITH THE AFRICAN STATES AND SWAPO. VAN HEERDEN SAID THAT THE DFA HOPED TO PERSUADE THE PRIME MINISTER ON THIS SCORE. VAN HEERDEN ASKED ABOUT THE STATUS OF THE RESPONSE TO FOURIE'S REQUEST FOR A LIST OF SUGGESTED STEPS. HE INDICATED THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND FOURIE WOULD BOTH BE IN PRETORIA UNTIL SUNDAY NIGHT, JUNE 4. THE POLCONS REPLIED THAT HE EXPECTED A RESPONSE

ON THIS ISSUE WOULD BE PROVIDED SOON.

3. VAN HEERDEN SAID IT LOOKED LIKE IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO MEET THE DECEMBER 31 INDEPENDENCE DATE. JOHN VIAL AND THE A-G'S LEGAL ADVISORS HAD REPORTED THAT MECHANICS OF THE PROCESS COULD NOT BE COMPLETED IN TIME TO MEET THE DATE. VAN HEERDEN BELIEVED THE SAG WOULD THUS BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT A DELAY IN THE TIMETABLE, ALTHOUGH SUPPORT WITHIN NAMIBIA WOULD BE NECESSARY TO JUSTIFY IT. HE AGREED THAT THE NNF AND THE CHURCH LEADERS WOULD SUPPORT DELAY AND THAT EVEN DTA APPEARED READY TO ACCEPT IT.

4. THE DELAY, HOWEVER, HAD TO BE FOR A LIMITED PERIOD. VAN HEERDEN THOUGHT THAT APRIL 1979 WOULD BE THE LATEST POSSIBLE DATE ACCEPTABLE TO THE SAG. "WE DEFINITELY WANT TO BE OUT OF THERE BY THE MIDDLE OF THE YEAR," HE SAID. THE POLCONS REMARKED THAT AN APRIL ELECTION DATE WOULD MEAN THAT CAMPAIGNING IN THE NORTHER AREAS WOULD TAKE PLACE DURING THE RAINY SEASON. VAN HEERDEN ACKNOWLEDGED THIS AND SPECULATED THAT THIS WOULD FAVOR SWAPO CAMPAIGNING.

5. WHEN ASKED HOW SOUTH AFRICA EXPECTED THINGS TO MOVE IN THE NEAR TO MID-TERM, VAN HEERDEN REPLIED THAT PERHAPS SOME POSITIVE MOVES WOULD BE MADE BY THE SAG AND AT THE SAME TIME BASIC PREPARATIONS FOR AN ELECTION WOULD BEGIN WITH THE REGISTRATION PROCESS. IT WOULD BE MADE CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT INITIATION OF THIS PROCESS WOULD BE SUBJECT TO REVIEW AND CHANGE

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BY THE UNSR. THEN, VAN HEERDEN SAID, IT WOULD BE UP TO THE WESTERN COUNTRIES TO BRING SWAPO TO ACCEPT THE PROPOSALS. HE WARNED THAT SOUTH AFRICA DURING THIS PERIOD WOULD FOLLOW A POLICY OF HITTING BACK AT ANY SWAPO PROVOCATION. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THE DANGER OF ESCALATION AND OF FURTHER DAMAGE TO PEACE PROSPECTS, BUT SAID THERE WAS NO WAY IN WHICH THIS POLICY COULD BE REVERSED. VAN HEERDEN SAID THERE HAD BEEN SOME FAVORABLE REACTION TO THE CASSINGA RAID FROM FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCLES IN EUROPE WHO INTERPRETED THE SAG SHOW OF STRENGTH AS A PROMISING SIGN FOR FUTURE STABILITY.

6. VAN HEERDEN REFERRED TO IMAGE PROBLEMS THE SAG WAS HAVING WITH THE A.G. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THE DAMAGE INFLICTED BY THE DETENTIONS UNDER AG 26 BUT SAID THERE WERE OTHER "MORE AVOIDABLE" ACTS SUCH AS PUBLIC STATEMENTS. HE BLAMED SOME OF THE PROBLEMS ON THE A-G'S ASSISTANT, M.D.J. STEENKAMP, A HARD-LINE CONSERVATIVE.

7. COMMENT. ACCEPTANCE OF A POSTPONEMENT IN THE INDEPENDENCE DATE BY THE SAG, IF CONFIRMED, WOULD HAVE IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS REGARDING SOUTH AFRICA'S INTENTIONS. IT WOULD SUGGEST THAT MOVEMENT TOWARD AN INTERNAL SETTLEMENT DOES NOT HAVE IMMEDIATE OVERRIDING PRIORITY AND THAT THE DOOR WILL BE KEPT OPEN FOR A

WHILE AT LEAST FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO BRING SWAPO
AROUND TO ACCEPTANCE OF THE PROPOSAL. THE SOUTH AFRICANS MAY
SEE POSTPONEMENT OF THE INDEPENDENCE DATE AS A CONCESSION AND
ONE OF THE POSITIVE STEPS WE HAVE BEEN URGING. AT THE SAME TIME,
AS VAN HEERDEN SUGGESTS, THE SAG INTENDS TO MAINTAIN THE
POLITICAL INITIATIVE BY MOVING AHEAD ON REGISTRATION OF VOTERS
AND POSSIBLY BY OTHER SUBSEQUENT STEPS. IN ADDITION, IT
HOPES TO RETAIN THE MILITARY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INITIATIVE BY
A POLICY OF RETALIATION FOR ACTS OF TERRORISM. EDMONDSON

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